

# Communities and spatial culture in a communally diverse city: Ahmedabad, India

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## Abstract

Modern cities attract people from different walks of life with different cultural backgrounds. Many design professionals are unaware of the relationship between culture and space, as well as the potential of space for fostering the culture of distinct communities. It is imperative that modern cities should enable different cultures to coexist, while still helping each community to keep its cultural identity and so avoid conflicts and tensions arising from it. It is argued that a culturally sensitive design approach could help in attaining a diverse but cohesive society, thus achieving a socially sustainable urban community.

This paper outlines recent research looking at 'spatial culture' and the culture of cities. Previous studies of cities show distinct morphological and syntactic differences between distinct cultural settings. This study examines the differences in morphology of different areas of the walled city of Ahmedabad, where different ethnic communities live in distinct localities. This analysis was carried out by using space syntax methodology. Different localities within the walled city were studied, both as they are embedded in the city, and in isolation. This was done in order to find the differences in their organisation of spaces and their relation to their immediate neighbourhoods, as well as to find the relation of spaces to other spaces within the walled area.

The investigation showed many similarities in the local areas of Ahmedabad in terms of their syntactic values and the structuring principles of spaces. But a detailed analysis showed some differences in the spatial patterns of Hindu and Muslim communities. These differences, when looked at in conjunction with the ethnic landscape of the city, revealed some interesting aspects of typical social and cultural patterns of the walled city of Ahmedabad.

It appears that while there are differences in culture and in the patterns of use of spaces, the manifestation of these differences is not as contrasting as expected from previous studies, which have compared similar aspects of cities located in diverse parts of the world. A significant finding of this study is that the relation of these distinct areas is a result of these cultural differences. This might be the critical reason for the formal and sometimes tense social situation of Ahmedabad.

## Keywords

Space Syntax,  
Community, Space  
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